



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**WORK PLACE LEARNING AMONG SUCCESSFUL  
PROFESSIONALS: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED  
TELEVISION PRODUCERS IN A PUBLIC TELEVISION STATION**

**RAMACHANDRAN PONNAN**

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**By**

**RAMACHANDRAN PONNAN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
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**Chairperson: Shamsuddin Ahmad, Ed.D.**

**Faculty: Educational Studies**

The study describes the learning experiences of successful Television Producers in A Public Television Station (PTS). Specifically the study sought to determine how these professionals acquire knowledge and expertise at their workplace. Professionals are people with knowledge who offer special services for the orderly functioning of the society. TV producers are professionals in the television industry. These professionals need to continually learn to develop their expertise. How they learn, especially in the context of their ever changing busy workplace, is important to continuing professional education.

The study is guided by the following research questions. 1) How do successful TV producers learn and acquire expertise at their workplace? 2) What contextual factors shape learning among successful TV producers? 3) How do personal characteristics and attributes facilitate learning among successful TV producers?

Data were collected mainly through interviews using a semi structured question guide, observation and document analysis. Nine producers were selected purposively using criteria-based selection. Copies of documents such as program reports, annual reports and minutes of meetings were gathered to corroborate information provided by the respondents. The researcher was guided by the constant comparative analysis method.

Three aspects of learning at the workplace emerged from the study. Successful producers acquire knowledge and expertise by, 1) The professional learning processes of formal and informal learning strategies. All respondents agreed to the importance of formal in-service training that they had to undergo when they are inducted into their profession. Benefits of such training are limited by resources, it is pertinent for producers to continuously seek learning opportunities on their own. 2) Learning through the understanding of broadcasting contexts, a distinct learning area emerging with the changing forms of broadcasting. Broadcasting contexts basically constitute the various stakeholders who occupy meaningful roles and even exert substantial influence on producers creating complex workplace procedures. 3) Learning through the development of personal characteristics and qualities imperative to learning among successful TV producers. These producers acquire the necessary attributes to learn from the workplace. Workplace learning emphasizes procedural knowledge of techniques and skills, and academic knowledge of facts and concepts. But learning has often overlooked dispositional knowledge of attitudes, values and interest that help professionals make well thought out decisions.

Three conclusions are drawn from the study. Firstly, producers took responsibility and used multiple strategies to learn from their unique workplace. Next, non-managerial producers paid cursory attention to acquiring expertise to operate in the emergent broadcasting contexts. And lastly, producers needed personal learning characteristics and attributes imperative to learning at their workplace.

Abstrak tesis dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi sebahagian keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PEMBELAJARAN DI TEMPAT KERJA DI KALANGAN PROFESIONAL  
YANG BERJAYA: KAJIAN KES PENERBIT-PENERBIT TERPILIH DI  
SEBUAH STESEN TELEVISYEN AWAM**

Oleh

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Kajian kes ini adalah bertujuan untuk menerangkan bagaimana pembelajaran dan perkembangan kepakaran berlaku di kalangan penerbit-penerbit televisyen yang berjaya di Sebuah Stesen Televisyen Awam (STA).

Secara spesifik objektif kajian adalah untuk memahami bagaimana para penerbit mendapatkan ilmu pengetahuan dan kepakaran di tempat mereka bekerja. Kajian adalah di kalangan para penerbit yang berprestasi tinggi dan berjaya di STA. Para profesional mempunyai pengetahuan dan boleh memberi perkhidmatan khas supaya masyarakat berfungsi secara teratur. Penerbit televisyen adalah antara kaum profesional yang mempunyai kepakaran dalam bidang penerbitan dan siaran program TV. Penerbit-penerbit TV perlu belajar untuk terus membangunkan kepakaran mereka. Bagaimana mereka belajar di tempat berkerja di STA, khususnya secara informal adalah penting bagi bidang pendidikan profesional berterusan.

Kajian ini telah dipandu oleh tiga soalan kajian iaitu: 1) Bagaimana penerbit-penerbit TV yang berjaya belajar dan mencari kepakaran di tempat mereka berkerja? 2) Apakah faktor-faktor kontekstual yang membentuk pembelajaran di kalangan penerbit TV yang berjaya? 3) Bagaimana ciri-ciri peribadi membantu pembelajaran di kalangan penerbit TV yang berjaya?

Data diperolehi menerusi temuduga dengan soalan-soalan yang telah dirangka sebagai panduan. Sembilan orang penerbit ditemuduga yang memenuhi kriteria-kriteria yang dikenalpasti. Maklumat-maklumat tambahan diperolehi menerusi laporan tahunan rancangan, minit mesyuarat dan post-mortem rancangan. Pengkaji menganalisis data berpandukan metodologi “constant comparative analysis”

Hasil kajian aspek-aspek pembelajaran di tempat kerja, iaitu bagaimana penerbit yang berprestasi tinggi memperoleh maklumat atau mendapat ilmu adalah menerusi: 1) Strategi pembelajaran profesional iaitu formal dan bukan formal, 2) Pembelajaran melalui konteks kefahaman dalam bidang penyiaran, 3) Pembelajaran menerusi perkembangan ciri-ciri peribadi yang amat diperlukan oleh para penerbit TV yang berjaya.

Para penerbit sedar tentang keperluan mendalami sesuatu bidang itu berdasarkan pengalaman-pengalaman di tempat kerja. Kesimpulan dari kajian mendapati: 1) Penerbit bertanggungjawab dan berusaha menggunakan pelbagai strategi pembelajaran dan mendapatkan kepakaran di tempat kerja mereka yang unik. 2) Penerbit yang mahir dalam bidang penerbitan, tetapi tidak mempunyai tanggungjawab



pengurusan, kurang memberi perhatian atau mempelajari selok-belok dalam konteks Penyiaran. 3) Penerbit memerlukan sifat sifat keperibadian tersendiri untuk terus belajar dan membina kepakaran di tempat kerja.

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Ramachandran Ponnann  
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I certify that an Examination Committee met on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2003 to conduct the final examination of Ramachandran Ponnann on his Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “Workplace Learning among Successful Professionals: A Case Study of Selected Producers in a Public Television Station” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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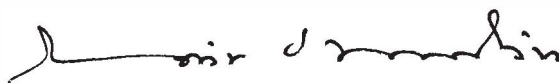
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## DECLARATION

I hereby certify that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any degree at UPM or other institutions.



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**RAMACHANDRAN PONNAN**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABU:	Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union.
AIBD:	Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development.
ASTRO:	All Asia-Satellite Television and Radio Operator
BBC:	British Broadcasting Corporation, Headquartered in London
DW:	Duestch Wella, A German International Production and Television Broadcast Station.
e-mas:	PTS's audience survey and marketing agency
IBC:	International Broadcasting Centre in Kuala Lumpur
ITM:	Institute Teknologi MARA (MARA Institute of Technology) now Universiti Teknologi MARA
NHK:	Nippon Hoso Kyokai, Japanese Public Radio and Television Broadcaster
PTS:	A Public Television Station
PTSTI:	Public Television Station Training Institute
UNDP:	United Nations Development Program

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction, the context of the study, developments in television production practices, statement of problem, purpose and research questions, significance of the study and the definition of terms. This is a study of how successful TV producers in a Public Television Station (PTS) learn and acquire expertise at their workplace.

The work of professionals is important for the way they define and execute their work. They are knowledgeable and lead the society to assume that, as professionals they would continue to learn throughout their working life. In the major professions, such as medicine (Meyer, 1975) and law (Vernon, 1983) and in other minor professions such as librarianship (Stone, 1986), professionals have acknowledged their commitment to continuing professional education. The increasing attention accorded to continuing education not only manifest itself as a necessity among the respective professional bodies but has also been misinterpreted as “ . . . because they can meet a re-licensure requirement” (Houle, 1980, p. 266). On the contrary, Parson (1977) recognizes professionals as people with special services to offer for the smooth and orderly functioning of the society.

In that respect, Television Producers are professionals who need to be adequately equipped with knowledge, expertise and be socialized professionally to provide the distinct services expected of them. Learning in the profession among

Among producers is important, to help them realize that continued learning is their responsibility that their improved knowledge and performance provide higher quality services to their audience. The means to such realization and an understanding of the producers' work is to reach the ends of effective practice. How professionals learn and acquire expertise has not been explicit to researchers, and it is unclear how knowledge can be effectively fostered among professionals through education (Benner, 1984; Isenberg, 1984).

### **Learning Among Professionals**

When the goal of learning among professionals is to improve practice and excel in what they do, they do not stop at formal education. Managers have been known to seldom use rational methods (Isenberg, 1984) and expert nurses have been known to adopt unplanned clinical practices (Benner, 1984). Cervero (1988) contends that professionals learn by using a repertoire of practical knowledge gained through prior experiences. Experience is used to solve problems in the unknown areas of knowledge, hence developing higher level expertise over time.

Two forms of gaining professional knowledge uncovered by Schon (1984; 1987) are to foster technical knowledge and practical knowledge among practitioners. Professionals learn academic knowledge or technical rationality from institutions formally. Then they immerse in their practice to acquire procedural knowledge or practical knowledge, and continue to enrich themselves with workplace experiences. TV producers need help to integrate their technical knowledge and practical experiences to think and reflect-in-action, to improve their practice. While producers improve their skills through the construction of their own repertoire of experiences,

they also need to be aware of the expanding contextual knowledge of their profession both within their workplace and outside of their practice.

### **TV Production as a Profession**

When television was inaugurated in Malaysia, producers were made up of expatriates and those who learned from the expatriates. Producers were sent to overseas stations to acquire practical knowledge. There were no institutions of formal learning in the craft of television production in Malaysia yet. The Public Television Station Training Institution (PTSTI) had practitioners for lecturers. According to Houle (1980), such lecturers often lectured on subjects of their own choosing to audience they did not know. Formal education in TV production was first introduced by the Mass Communications Department of University Science Malaysia. Subsequently University Malaya and University Technology MARA and the National University introduced TV production curricula through their media and communications departments.

Graduates equipped with academic knowledge for TV production or technical knowledge found employment with PTS as producers. When other private TV stations and private production houses came into the broadcasting scene, graduates from local universities and overseas also found employment as producers and other broadcast related professions in these TV Stations. These graduates of broadcasting were schooled in the “knowledge that” or technical rationality. As producers, they applied their knowledge at their workplace by gaining practical experience and using such experiences to solve new problems at work. Thus effecting continuous professional learning to practice at the workplace (Harris, 1998).

However, TV producers need to continually move beyond their current state of knowledge and competence. Informal ways of learning have become imminent owing to the state of learning prevailing at the workplace. Producers' device their personal ways of learning from the experiences they engage in at the workplace. The Public Television Station as the workplace presents unique learning opportunities for producers' professional development.

### **The Context of the Study**

A cabinet paper on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1960 set the framework for the introduction of television to the then Federation of Malaya. G.F.Brickendon from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was seconded under UNESCO's funding to the Television Department, to oversee television programming, production and the administrative aspects of the organization (Aziz, 1987). Television broadcasting began with the broad goals of informing, educating and entertaining the masses.

But television was to adopt more meaningful roles of reengineering and socializing the masses soon after the May 13<sup>th</sup> riots in 1969. According to the Tun Sambanthan Report (Aziz, 1987), radio and television broadcasting was proposed to be reorganized into a Public Radio and Television Station, under the Department of Broadcasting. Among its major roles were, the report said, "to . . . play a more positive role in the planning and implementation of policies, and periodically to ensure that the dissemination of information to the masses of the overall government of the country has been effective " (p.222).



When PTS's services began to characterize itself as a public broadcaster, and satisfied with its role as a Government propagation media that reached its people, it was soon learned that PTS was losing its audience to neighboring Singapore Broadcasting Corporation and the Thai Television Channels. This was spelt out in the Minister of Information's memorandum to the government on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 1974. The organization's needs were then expanded to include being able to produce competitive and quality programs to recapture its rightful audience, hence the challenge to program makers in PTS. As a result, color television went on air on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 1974. And the first call on television then was for all TV personnel to improve their capability and commitment to producing the best quality programs. Producers were guided by a new set of organizational goals, which have not changed much to date. These goals are:

- To explain and provide widespread and in-depth coverage on government policies and programs so that they would be fully understood by the people;
- To stimulate interest and promote the way of thinking of the people in line with government policies and aspirations;
- To stimulate national unity through the use of the Malay language among the people;
- To develop civic consciousness and promote the development of Malaysian arts and culture;
- To provide suitable materials for general information, education and entertainment purposes.